

## Chenille at Cankdeska Cikana Community College Next Steps Project

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The Next Steps Project is the Cankdeska Cikana Community College's Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. The Next Steps Project directors were traveling during early months of the project, and when they arrived at the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's office in Fort Yates, North Dakota, to ask for assistance with recruitment, they found an eager young woman patiently waiting in the office to meet them. That young woman was Chenille Condon. She had been notified about the new HPOG project and the date the Next Steps staff planned to visit, and she was waiting to find out how she could join the project, and how soon.

Chenille is an enrolled member of Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of Fort Yates, a married woman with four children. She always wanted to get a college diploma, and she acquired her General Educational Development (GED) certification in January 2011.

Chenille entered the Next Steps Project as a member of its initial cohort of Certified Nursing Assistant and Quality Service Provider trainees at the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe site in the spring of 2011. She worked hard throughout the program, juggling the training and being a full-time mom. Despite her current circumstances and despite being surrounded by poverty, Chenille knew she wanted more for her family. With the help of Next Steps, she realized the opportunity for a different life was there.

The opportunity to work in the field of nutrition became Chenille's goal. She realized that tribal communities are desperately in need of nutrition professionals due to high obesity and diabetes rates that surpass those of most other races in the United States. Chenille relocated and enrolled in the nutrition program at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota. She has worked hard to earn good grades and stay in school in spite of traumatic life circumstances.

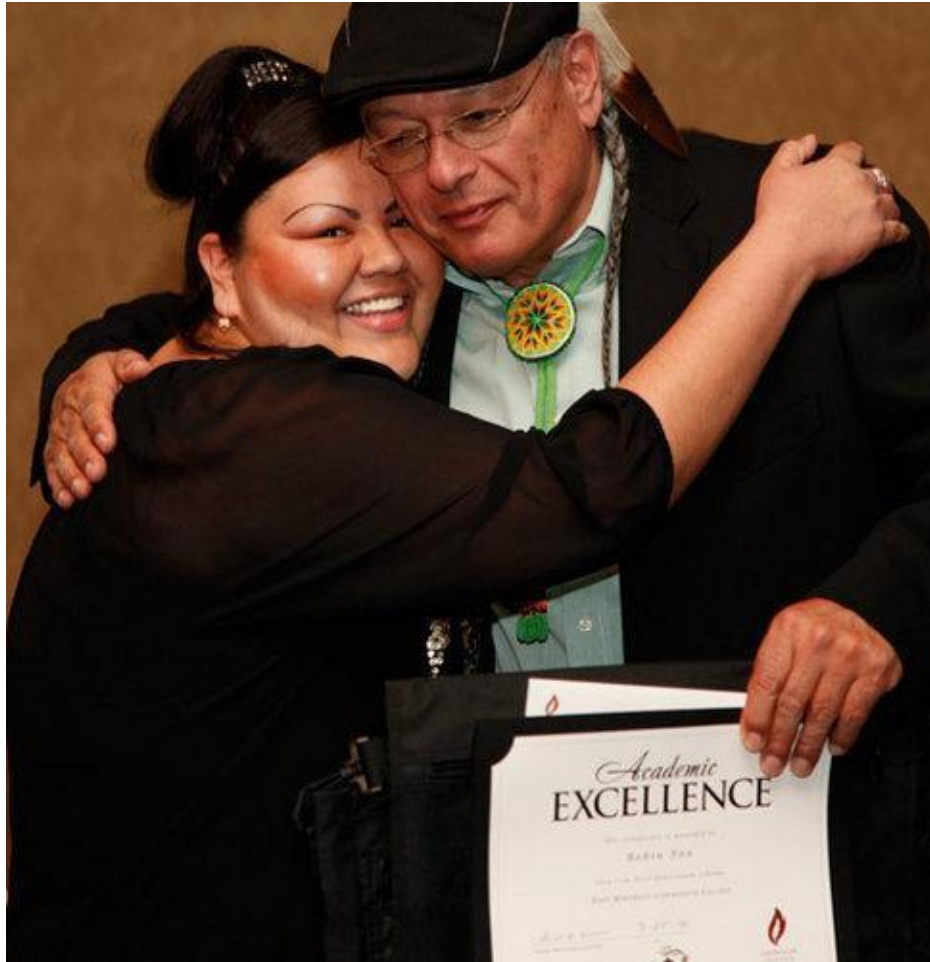
On May 29, 2012, Chenille gave birth to her fourth child. Just two days later, she went through a bronchoscopy, and then, on June 06, a biopsy that was supposed to take 20 minutes but turned into a nightmare. During the procedure the doctor cut her jugular vein, causing complications that led to a massive stroke which left Chenille paralyzed on her whole left side. She had to learn how to walk all over again and had no movement of her left arm at all. Chenille stayed in the hospital for almost 30 days, doing lots of therapy. Due to financial hardship, she and her family had to move back to Fort Yates from Bismarck.

Chenille was determined to get a college diploma, and her disability was not going to stop her. Though she was depressed, she had to keep positive and pray. Chenille believes that when you start something, you need to finish, and that is what she teaches her children and how she pushes herself. She requested and was granted permission to complete her nutrition degree online, and she completed the fall 2012 semester of online classes and got good grades even

without the full use of her left arm and hand. Chenille is currently taking her spring 2013 online classes, and she plans on moving back to Bismarck in the summer to complete the rest of her schooling on campus. She will graduate in the spring of 2014 with a degree in nutrition from United Tribes Technical College.

Chenille has had a roller coaster of a life for the past 10 months. Because she could not use her left arm, she could not care for her newborn son and had a family member taking care of him, seeing him only on weekend visits. Now she continues to be in a custody battle for her son as she carries on with her schooling. Chenille is very thankful for all the support the Next Steps Project has given her and all the mentors who have worked with her and become lifelong friends.

To know Chenille Condon as she has progressed through the Next Steps HPOG program is to know fortitude, wisdom, and courage personified. A person who knows her is humbled by the quiet and unrelenting heroism of this young Lakota woman. Chenille is one of a kind and deserves a lot of credit for not giving up. By overcoming the barriers in her way, not only does Chenille have a success story; she is a living miracle.



### **Robin L. Fox at Cankdeska Cikana Community College's Next Steps Program**

This is the story of Robin L. Fox. Robin is a Native American woman and an enrolled member of Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold, North Dakota. Robin had a dream of attending college and becoming a nurse. In 2004, Robin met Deb Wilson, the director of the University of North Dakota (UND) Recruitment and Retention of American Indians into Nursing (RAIN) program at a college career fair at Fort Berthold Community College (FBCC) in New Town. The RAIN program is a major subcontractor and service provider for the Next Steps Project. Deb Wilson encouraged Robin to pursue her dreams of becoming a nurse. She offered Robin kind words, information on available services, and a path to pursue.

Like many of her peers, Robin did not follow her dreams as a teen. Due to overwhelming circumstances, she felt her goals were unachievable. Robin was born and raised in Seattle, Washington and had a wonderful life until the loss of her mother. While her mother was still living, she encouraged Robin to apply for the RAIN program. She gave her daughter a RAIN pamphlet she found at the Seattle Indian Health Board office. After the loss of her mother, Robin lived from place to place before becoming homeless. She spent a good part of her life on the streets of Seattle, living out of a backpack. Despite these difficult circumstances, Robin never lost sight of her dream of becoming a nurse. Robin held on to that RAIN pamphlet and

carried that information with her on the streets of Seattle. When the pamphlet became damaged or too difficult to read, she would go to the Indian Center in Seattle to pick up a new one.

Robin met her husband, David Merkley, in 2004 and moved to North Dakota. She brought along that pamphlet with the information on becoming a nurse. She enrolled in the nursing program at FBCC under the Next Steps program. Next, she obtained her License Practical Nursing (LPN) certificate and passed the State boards in 2006. In 2011, she was encouraged by RAIN Mentor Melinda Balderas to pursue her path to becoming a registered nurse (RN). Robin successfully applied to the Dakota Nursing Program at FBCC, and graduated with her Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in nursing. After passing the RN State boards, she became an RN in 2012!

Robin continues in her nursing education today. Throughout the support and guidance of Liz Yellowbird, her Next Steps Program Mentor, she has entered the RN-BSN distance program at UND. Robin is happily married with five beautiful daughters and is currently residing in Parshall, North Dakota. Upon completion of her advanced nursing degree, she plans to work providing healthcare services in the scope of her practice on the Fort Berthold Reservation. Robin is very appreciative of the Next Steps Program and those early words of encouragement and support that Deb Wilson offered her so many years ago.

**State:** North Dakota

**Ethnicity:** American Indian

**Age:** 30-39

**Gender:** Female

**Special Population:** low income

**Community Type:** Rural client

**Occupational Sub-Category:** Direct Patient Care